

false choices between, one, supporting the Iraqis with no end of troop deployments in sight or staying the course, or, two, laying down arbitrary deadlines for troop withdrawals. The reality is more complicated than this.

We should not limit the Commander in Chief's options in Iraq. That is why I will vote against the Levin amendment. However, anyone who believes we will be in Iraq indefinitely ignores the forces of reality, as the Iraqi Security Adviser's op-ed makes very clear. It is not in Iraq's interest for the United States to remain in Iraq. Our influence is limited and becoming more limited every day.

I note another story in yesterday's Washington Post that detailed the reaction of Vietnam veterans to the war in Iraq. I know a little something about this. My generation worries about Iraq becoming not the failure of our sons and daughters fighting in Iraq, but our failure as policymakers—policymakers—because I believe our policymakers failed us in Vietnam.

Our troops today are doing what we did a generation ago in Vietnam. They are fighting bravely. They are doing their very best. They believe in their country, they have faith in their leaders, and we cannot let them down.

I would say that there may be two Members of Congress today—Congressman MURTHA in the House and myself—who served in Vietnam and were both here working in the Congress in the spring of 1975. Many might recall that time because that was the time the House of Representatives essentially voted to cut off funding for American presence in Vietnam. That was a disastrous decision for disastrous reasons, but it was the result of having a Congress absent and not involved in the policy formation, not involved in asking the tough questions, not involved in doing its job.

This debate today is critical. It is important for our country, agree or disagree with it. Amendments such as the Levin amendment are relevant, and they are an important contribution. When we debate these issues, Congress is doing its job. We do not want our legacy as a Congress to be no congressional oversight. We do not want it to be said we were irrelevant when it becomes too late. We do not want to repeat the history of Vietnam. We must not allow what happened in the Congress in April of 1975 to happen with Iraq, and it happened because we didn't debate the issues. It happened because the Congress was absent; it forfeited its responsibilities. It debased the very responsibility of elected officials. And that is why to debate these issues in a legitimate, honest, open manner is so important to our country, and to keep it out of politics, the "gotcha" kind of amendments, the "gotcha" kind of phraseology of which America is sick.

This is a serious issue. We have lost over 2,500 men and women in Iraq. We have been in Iraq longer than the Korean war. We have over 18,000 wounded.

We are spending around \$10 billion a month. The Congress must be present.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska is advised he has now consumed 8 minutes.

Mr. HAGEL. I ask for 15 seconds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, take a minute or so.

Mr. HAGEL. I thank the chairman.

I conclude, Mr. President, with this: What would be the real disaster for America, the real disaster for Iraq, the disaster for the Middle East, the disaster for the world is if this Congress is not present and accounted for and is not part of a policy formation for not just Iraq but the Middle East and the future of our country and the world. That would be the disaster. That is why it is so important today that we debate this issue; it is so important that we have amendments, such as the Levin-Reed amendment, that are offered in an important way that make a contribution to the understanding of America's presence and commitment and our responsibilities as a free nation and the beacon of freedom in the world.

Mr. President, I appreciate the time. I yield the floor.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank our colleague for his remarks. He speaks from a body of personal experience and considerable courage as a member of the Armed Forces of the United States, which he has exhibited in these years.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, may I have 10 seconds? I wish to add my thanks to the Senator from Nebraska for his very constructive, positive remarks.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, we have on our side Senators THUNE and ROBERTS who are waiting. I know Senator BOND has indicated he wishes to speak, and Senator INHOFE. I wish to advise those Senators I have to recognize those on the floor; otherwise, we lose time to a quorum call or otherwise. So we are going to alternate at this time. We are going to shift to the other side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Delaware.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, 6 months ago, I was in Iraq with Senator HAGEL. We met with a number of people. Among the people with whom we met in one of the beautiful palaces of Saddam Hussein not far from Baghdad Airport, were the leaders of our American military forces in that country.

During the course of that conversation, we heard these words from our top military leader: It is time for America to move toward the door. He didn't say it is time for us to walk out of the door, leave, close the door. He said: It is time for us to move toward the door.

Subsequent to that, we met with Iraqi military and political leaders and our own diplomatic leaders, and the message I heard in almost all of those meetings was: it is time for America to begin moving toward the door.

We have had a policy in Iraq, at least in the last couple of years, of stay the course. "Stay the course" is a good slogan, and there have been times in our history as a nation when staying the course was actually a pretty good strategy. This is not one of those times.

What is needed is a different—not a different slogan, but a different strategy, and the strategy we need would be not stay the course but change the course.

The American people would like for us to begin to bring our men and women home and, as it turns out, so would the Iraqi people. In talking with the President upon our return, I said: You know, Mr. President, sometimes less is more. In this instance, having a smaller presence, a less visible presence would actually be more supportive of our efforts in Iraq than not.

The Iraqi people don't want us to cut and run. They don't want us to leave. They want us to be close by. They want us to be not far away and to be helpful if we can be, if needed. But they don't want us to leave this year. They don't want us to leave entirely next year.

Senator HAGEL just quoted the words of the Iraqi National Security Council. That is what we heard in Iraq last December. Their message has been pretty consistent, and it has been pretty much the same.

Last year in the Senate we voted by an overwhelming majority that 2006 needs to be a year of significant transition in Iraq. In other words, the Senate, on a bipartisan basis, called on the Bush administration to take action this year in 2006 to change course in Iraq to make clear to the Iraqis and the rest of the world that the United States does not intend to stay in Iraq forever.

The amendment before us today, the Levin-Reed amendment, builds on that resolution we passed barely a year ago. It rejects the extremes on both sides of the Iraqi debate—the one side of the extreme that would say either we should stay in Iraq on an open-ended basis, and the other extreme to say we ought to withdraw all of our troops by an arbitrary deadline. This amendment rejects both of those, and it says instead: Why don't we find a way to change the course going forward?

The policy of "stay the course" isn't working for our troops. They have served bravely, they have served honorably despite very difficult circumstances in extended tours of duty. More than 2,500 of our finest have been killed in action. Almost 18,000 have been injured, including a former member of my staff, Marine Corps LCpl Sean Barney, who was shot in the neck last month in Fallujah. Fortunately, he is alive. He is going to live.